

Chapter 5. Early Modern France: the Valois Cycle (1450–1660)

5.1 Overview

During the early modern period France went through two secular waves: the Valois and the Bourbon cycles (we use our convention of naming the cycle after the dynasty that ruled during its integrative phase). In this chapter we dissect the demographic, economic, and social trends of the Valois cycle (we do not deal with the Bourbon cycle in this book because its dynamics, especially during the later phases, were greatly modified by the Industrial Revolution).

As we described in the previous chapter, the end of the Hundred Years War marked the beginning of a secular integrative trend in France. The expansion phase lasted until roughly 1520 and the stagflation phase from 1520 to 1570. The crisis of the Wars of Religion was followed by depression and another crisis of the Fronde. As a result, the disintegrative tendency prevailed during the period of 1570–1660. The cycle ended when Louis XIV, “the Sun King”, assumed personal control of the government, marking the beginning of the expansionary phase of the next secular cycle.

Population and economy

The population trend is depicted in Figure 4.1a (in the previous chapter). As usual, integrative phase was a period of sustained population growth. During the disintegrative phase population declines were interspersed with short-term periods of growth (these dynamics will be discussed more closely in Section 5.6). Prices (Figure 4.1b, see the previous chapter) also behaved in the way generally consistent with the phases of the cycle: the great price inflation (the Price Revolution of the Sixteenth Century) was followed by deflation during the seventeenth. Real wages were the mirror image of prices (Figure 5.1). During the sixteenth century real wages literally collapsed to one-fifth of their level during the “Golden Age” of later fifteenth century. The seventeenth century saw some increase (with important fluctuations that will be discussed later), but the working classes never regained their economic ground: even at the peak of the later seventeenth century, the real wages were less than half of those two centuries before.

Figure 5.1 Real wage in France, 1450–1700, in kg of grain per day. The real wage is calculated by taking an average of the wages paid to laborers and craftsmen in Paris, as reported by Allen (2001), and deflating them with the price of wheat (Abel 1980).

Social structure

The social structure of France c.1500 was not dramatically different from that of the medieval period. The rural population lived in 30,000 villages (parishes). At the top of the rural hierarchy was the seigneur, usually but not always a nobleman (Knecht 2001:8). According to the estimate of Contamine (1997:56), the proportion of nobles among the general population was 1.5 percent. There were about 200,000 persons in 40,000 noble families. Thus, many parishes had more than one noble family. The noble density was particularly high in Bretagne, where some parishes had more than 10 nobles (Contamine 1997:54).

Below the seigneur in the social hierarchy came “farmers” (*fermier*). These were substantial peasants with 30 ha of land or more (Knecht 2001:9). Their abundant land, which they cultivated using their own and hired labor, permitted them to lead comfortable, if not ostentatious way of life (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:181), and left surplus that could be used to buy more land, or set up as grain-merchant or cattle-breeder. Farmers often acted as intermediaries between the seigneur and the rest of peasants (Knecht 2001:9).

The first estate in the village was represented by the parish priest. The numbers of the secular clergy were in the region of 100,000 including 30,000 parish priests. There were about 100 bishops and several hundreds of abbots (Knecht 2001:9).

The urban society had its own hierarchy. The elites were divided between wealthy merchants and office-holders. Below them were artisans, smaller merchants, journeymen, and large numbers of manual workers.

The state

Time-series data on the royal revenues during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are hard to come by, and numbers given by various authorities often contradict each other. Figure 5.2 shows three views of royal taxation during the Valois cycle: (1) total taxes, calculated by Braudel and Labrousse (1977:979) for a set of years from 1453 to 1683 (original data from Chaunu), (2) a recent compilation of the total revenues between 1515 and 1788 (eighteenth century numbers are not shown) by Kiser and Linton (2001) and (3) the *taille* (land tax) given in Bonney (1999). The latter two datasets are annual and were converted to decadal averages for presentation purposes. All datasets are expressed in the same units (millions of hectoliters of wheat). Although they disagree in detail, the overall picture is rather consistent. These data suggest that real revenues grew during the second half of the fifteenth century, due to increasing taxpayer base resulting from population growth and territorial conquest. During the sixteenth century state revenues stagnated and then declined in real terms, reaching the lowest point during the Wars of Religion. After the change of dynasty, the Bourbons were able to restore royal finances (apart from the fiscal collapse during the Fronde), and then, under Louis XIV, exceed the levels achieved by the Renaissance monarchs.

Figure 5.2 Royal revenues in France, 1450–1700.

Because we do not currently have a good summary of French coin hoards for the period after 1385, we use the instability index developed by Sorokin (1937). In Figure 5.3 we plot the index for the period of 1150–1700, giving us a synoptic view of both the medieval and the early modern cycles. The first two periods of internal warfare, around 1200 and 1400, respectively, match well the peaks of coin hoard deposition (compare to Figure 4.2)—this increases our confidence that the two measures of sociopolitical instability reflect real historical processes. The third period of internal warfare is characterized by a double peak, corresponding to the Wars of Religion and the Fronde. Territorial expansion generally occurred during the periods of internal stability and national consolidation (Figure 4.1c). The century after 1450 resulted in almost doubling of the French territory, followed by stagnation and even reverses until the beginning of the next cycle, when France enjoyed another period of territorial expansion under Louis XIV.

Figure 5.3 Sorokin's Instability Index for France, 1150–1700

This concludes the overview of the main trends during the Valois cycle. We now turn to the more detailed discussion of the cycle phases.

5.2 Expansion: 1450-1520

General population

The period between 1450 and 1520 was very favorable for demographic expansion. The first and foremost factor was the expulsion of the English from France and the end of the Hundred Years War (usually dated to 1453). Another important threat to internal stability was removed when the Burgundian state collapsed in 1477 as a result of the defeat and death of

Chalres the Bold at the hands of the Swiss at Nancy. Epidemics continued to strike the population, but at a comparatively lower rate than during the fourteenth or seventeenth centuries.

Agricultural production increased (due simply to the reclamation of previously abandoned land) and before 1520 famine was a rare event (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:11-12). A trend in the overall volume of agricultural production can be traced by examining the receipts of tithes (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:45-6). The lowest point of agricultural production in the Paris basin was achieved around 1440. Between 1450 and 1500 cereal production nearly doubled. In the south, the lowest point was earlier, between 1400 and 1430, and the overall supply of cereals doubled, or more than doubled by the end of the fifteenth century. It is likely, then, that food production in 1500 was double the minimum of the early fifteenth century. Population growth during this period was much more modest (it is very hard to give a quantitative estimate, but increase was no more than 50%). In other words, the supply of food per capita, and by implication, the standard of living, grew very substantially.

Another indicator of the high standard of living during the fifteenth century is provided by the real wages. A daily wage of the Parisian laborer could buy 16 kg of grain in the 1490s, compared to less than 4 kg one century later. Poitevin reapers had to work five days to earn the equivalent of 1 hectoliter of wheat in 1467–72; In 1578 they had to work 14 days to earn the same. Generally speaking, during the sixteenth century wages lost more than two-thirds of their buying capacity (Figure 5.3), and the high real wages of the fifteenth century were not to be matched until the late eighteen hundreds.

As a result of relative prosperity among the common people towards the end of the fifteenth century, the general mortality rate fell to a comparatively low level, and the obsession with death, so prevalent earlier in the century with its *danses macabre* and recumbent effigies of naked corpses, ceased to occupy cultural heights (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:11). The vigor of demographic expansion was manifested in repopulation of the countryside and immigration after reconquest. For example, many villages in the Gironde, abandoned during the English wars, were resettled with the new colonists from the Occitan and French-speaking zones starting with the reign of Louis XI (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:11).

The elites

The noble fortunes began their recovery during this period (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996: Graphique 29). The dynamics of revenues of one noble family, the seigneurie du Plessis-Grammoire in Anjou, show that the worst period was the 1420s. The rising tendency becomes evident after 1460, and by 1500 the levels of 1300 are matched (in nominal terms). The restoration of noble incomes by 1500 appears to be a general pattern. For example, the seigneurie de Craon increased from less than 1000 livres in 1396 to 1700 livres toward 1500. The income of the lordship of Saint-Fargeau was about a hundred livres in the mid-century; by 1484 it increased to 500 livres (Carpentier and Le Mené 1996:468). A similar dynamic is demonstrated by several seigneuries in Normandy (Bois 1984:257, Dewald 1987) and by the House of La Trémoille (Weary 1977:D1007),

The state

The reconciliation of the Dauphinist and Burgundian factions in 1435 ended the civil war, except for two aftershocks. The first one was the Praguerie in 1440, a revolt by the great nobles against the king (Charles VII), with support from the dauphin (later Louis XI). The second was the League of the Public Weal in 1465, a conspiracy against Louis XI by the dukes of Alençon, Burgundy, Berri, Bourbon, and Lorraine, again supported by the dauphin (future Charles VIII). After this last aftershock, France was not to see an elite rebellion for a century. The core regions

of France were spared any serious fighting from 1453 to the start of the Wars of Religion in 1562 (Knecht 2001:3).

Increasing internal strength of France (both economic and sociopolitical) was rapidly translated by the ruling elites into territorial expansion. The state territory grew, first by a reconquest of the English-occupied lands, then by the reversal to the crown of the appanages earlier granted to Valois princes. In 1477 Charles the Bold of Burgundy died at the battle of Nancy without male issue. Louis XI united the duchy of Burgundy with the crown and occupied the county of Burgundy (Franche Comté). On the extinction of the house of Anjou in 1480, Anjou, Bar, Maine, and Provence reverted to the French crown. Other smaller incidents of territorial expansion were the acquisition of Cerdagne and Roussillon (1462) and redemption of the Somme towns (1463). The last great duchy of medieval France that was still independent of the Crown, Brittany, was attached to France when Charles VIII married Anne of Brittany in 1491. In 1495 Charles VIII began a series of Italian campaigns, which eventually mutated into the great Habsburg-Valois struggle for European hegemony of the sixteenth century. The territorial expansion of France during the fifteenth century was striking. From a low point of 1430 of less than 0.29 Mm² the territory controlled by the French kings reached 0.5 Mm² in 1510. Increased territory and growing population expanded the tax base of the kingdom. Between 1453 and 1515 state revenues tripled from 1.8 to 5.5 million *livres tournois* (Braudel and Labrousse 1977:979).

5.3 Stagflation: 1520–1570

Population and economy

By 1560 the population of France doubled from its late medieval low (Dupâquier et al. 1988), reaching 20 million, or roughly the same level as around 1300. For the next century, however, the population stagnated and even declined. In fact, this level will not be exceeded until the middle years of Louis XIV (Salmon 1976:32). The reason for the cessation of population growth is clear—population has approached the carrying capacity of the land, the Malthusian-Ricardian “ceiling”. As we noted in the previous section, cereal production (as indexed by tithes) expanded rapidly in the post-1450 period. Between 1450 and 1505 production gains substantially outpaced population. After a brief transitional period (1505–20), the production of cereals continued to rise (until 1560) but at a slower pace, because one was approaching a limit in the amount of land available (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:121). Now it was population that outpaced production, and by 1560 population reached the upper ceiling that could be supported in France given the sixteenth century level of technology. It is noteworthy that the population peak of 1560, ca. 20 million, was essentially the same that was achieved during the Capetian cycle.

This number makes sense (at least to the order of magnitude) in light of what we know about the productive capacity of the medieval and early modern French agriculture. “At the rate of 210 to 240 kilograms of cereals a year per inhabitant (this figure takes into account children, who eat less than adults) and adding the quantities of grain necessary for sowing and for animal consumption, the 20 million inhabitants of France between 1550 and 1720 must have consumed 60 million quintals of cereals” (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:231). Since the annual cereal crop was produced on about 10 million ha (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:240), the average yield implied by these numbers is 600 kg/ha or 8 hl/ha. The latter number is comfortably in the middle between average yields prevailing in the south (5 hl/ha) and those of the north (10 hl/ha), taking into account the rotation systems prevailing in each region (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:176).

The chronology of cereal production dynamics, with the approach to the ceiling dated to 1560 (and not exceeded until after 1700) is particularly relevant to the north of France. Elsewhere there were important regional variations. Thus, the south apparently reached the production peak during the 1540s. This maximum level was not to be bettered until a century later, between 1649

and 1678. In Alsace, by contrast, the best period was reached between 1600 and 1630, before the collapse of the Thirty Years War (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:120). These regional variations will be discussed below in the context of when population declines occurred in different parts of France.

Population growth had a direct effect on peasant/land ratios. In the depopulated fifteenth century middle-sized landowners who owned about 10 ha accounted for about one-half of those listed in the cadastral surveys. Most of these fair-sized holdings disappeared by 1550, some as a result of accelerating subdivision within families, others bought by nobles and urban bourgeois (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:56). In the Paris region land fragmentation achieved incredible degree, with only 1.3 ha per tenant (Jacquart, cited in Le Roy Ladurie 1987:162)

Population growth also caused a general rise in ground-rents, although there were important geographic variations in the timing of rent increases. To start with, the ground-rents were very low in the fifteenth century. In the village of Vierzay (Soissonais) the rent was only 0.5 hectoliter of grain per ha in 1448. By 1511 it rose to 2 hl/ha (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:177). Between 1500 and 1560 rents stayed steady at about 1.5 hl/ha in the south of France and 2.5 hl/ha in the Paris region and Soissonais. During the wars of religion rents slightly declined, but in the seventeenth century they again started to increase. About 1650-70 they rose to 3 hl/ha in Languedoc and to 5 hl/ha in the Paris region, which amounted to almost one-half of the product, taking disparities of yields and rotation systems (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:177).

In other regions, such as the Hurepoix and Poitou, rent increase already occurred by 1560. For example, the *métayers* in Poitou had to pay one-half of their produce to the landlord in the sixteenth century (compared to one-quarter to one-third in the preceding one). These conditions of harsh *métayage* were relaxed only after 1650 (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:177-8).

Land prices increased. In the 1550s a hectare of ploughland around Paris cost 63 *livres*. Two decades later land prices increased to 150 *livres* per hectare (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:239-240).

The trend in real wages was typical of the stagflation phase. The average real wage of Parisian builders fell from 25±2 kg of wheat per day, typical of peaceful periods of the fifteenth century, to 7–8 kg during the second half of the sixteenth century, and then to less than 5 kg during the disastrous decade of 1590–9 (Figure 5.1). Agricultural wages also declined calamitously. The real wage of vineyard workers lost two-thirds to three-quarters of its value between 1495 and 1560. On the other hand, some categories of workers, like hay-reapers, did somewhat better, losing only 30% in real terms during the same period (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:185-6). The fall in real wages affected not only the working poor. Whereas in 1480 the manager of a large farm near Narbonne received a salary equivalent to 31 hl of wheat his successor's salary in 1590 was only 17.2 hl (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:69).

One stratum that did relatively well (or, at least, did not lose ground) during the stagflation phase were the farmers, who benefited from their situation as intermediaries between the lords and peasants. The economic conjuncture of rising grain prices, stagnating rents (whether decimal or fiscal), and rapidly falling wages worked to their advantage (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:181-184). As a result, during the sixteenth century (and unlike the following one) the farmers were able to hold their own and even aspire to advance up the social hierarchy.

Elites

While the stagflation phase saw a progressive worsening of the economic situation of common people, for the elites the economic conjuncture was good, resulting in two related developments. First, growing inequality among commoners meant that although the majority of

them were sinking into misery, a small minority did very well and acquired substantial wealth. These well-to-do peasants (“farmers” discussed in the previous paragraph) and merchants naturally aspired to translate their wealth into status. Many such elite aspirants succeeded, generating a steady inflow into the ranks of nobility.

Second, given favorable economic conditions, many noble families provided substantial inheritances to their younger sons. This practice led to estate subdivision and multiplication of nobles. For example, one of the richest French magnates, François de la Trémoille (1502–42) had to provide for five sons (and dowries for two daughters). This division of the estate and the subsequent Wars of Religion led to a drop of family revenues from 600 kg of silver in the 1530s to 430 kg in 1619 (Weary 1977, Major 1981). Another example is the Roncherolles family in Normandy, who divided their estates in 1570 among four sons. The barony of Pont-St-Pierre went to the eldest son, but the other three also got what amounted to substantial lordships (Dewald 1987:163). These two examples, of course, are no more than anecdotal evidence, but data on the noble families of the Bayeux region during 1463–1666 provide a firmer quantitative support (Wood 1980). During most of this period the numbers of ancient nobility (families who were ennobled prior to 1463) shrank, except for one time interval, 1540–1598 (see Table 5.2 and discussion in Section 5.5).

Driven by upward mobility and estate subdivision the numbers of nobles increased dramatically during the sixteenth century. The numbers of *chevaliers* (knights), for example, doubled during the sixteenth century from 1000 to more than 2000 (Orlea 1980:59). But the top elite stratum (*pairs laïques*—lay peers) expanded even faster: from only 12 in 1505 to 36 in 1588 (Labatut 1972). An inevitable result of this increase was intensifying intra-elite competition for status and wealth. One way we can gauge the increasing social pressure on the elites is by the incidence of intraelite violence, which during this period took the form of dueling (see also Chapter 3). Dueling had almost disappeared in France during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Harding 1978:77). Under François I and Henri II a handful of judicial duels took place with royal sanction. After 1560, however, dueling for personal honor and without royal sanction became so common that La Noue believed more noblemen died from it than in combat. Estoile believed 7,000 to 8,000 were killed in the two decades after 1588 (Harding 1978:77,253). It was said that Henri IV granted over 6,000 pardons for the killing of gentlemen in duels during the first ten years of the seventeenth century (Stone 1965:246). Dueling was effectively eliminated only a century later, during the rule of Louis XIV (Collins 1995:85).

Another sign of the ripening demographic-structural crisis was the increased competition for patronage among elite networks. The struggle between the Montmorency and Guise factions for control of the court patronage is famous. After the death of Henri II, during the short reign of François II, the Guise faction managed to practically monopolize the royal patronage in their hands (Harding 1978:35). The death of François II and alienation of the Guises from the court allowed Catherine de Medici to regain the control of the royal patronage, but at the expense of alienating a large segment of the French elites.

Elites and the state

At the same time that the expanding elite numbers were putting increasing pressure on the state finances, its ability to collect revenue (in real terms) was declining (Figure 5.2). The fiscal crisis of the state was a major precondition of the crisis of the Wars of Religion. In 1559 Henri II signed the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis with the Spanish. The cessation of the Habsburg-Valois wars meant that “hundreds of noble sons were thrown back on the home estates, where the family resources were often insufficient to support them” (Bitton 1969). Moreover, the financial situation of the crown made it impossible to continue the patronage system on the old footing

(Briggs 1998:15). The Cardinal of Lorraine, beset by would-be clients, was reduced to threatening to hang the next man who asked for a pension (Briggs 1998:15). The contraction of the largesse of the state affected even the top magnates of the kingdom—provincial governors (Harding 1978:47). The governors from southern and western provinces reported that they could not rely on the loyalty of their subordinates, who were attracted to the new religion. “As the era of the secret conventicles came to an end, service as ‘protectors’ for the Calvinist communities represented an available option to royal service for noblemen, and the pastors apparently resorted to straightforward bribery” (Harding 1978:49).

The monopolization of the patronage by the Guises bred much resentment by those they excluded (Briggs 1998:15). The “Tumult of Amboise” (1560) was a conspiracy by some protestant nobles against the Guises. Most of the conspirators were petty seigneurs of ancient lineage (Salmon 1976:124).

As the financial crisis deepened the wages of troops fell into arrears, and eventually the state lost control of the army. Contemporary letters (cited by Harding 1978:49–50) provide a wonderful illustration of this demographic-structural mechanism of state collapse (Goldstone 1991). One officer reported in 1561 that his unpaid troops in Brittany “have left to pillage ... In the end I expect to be all alone. There is so much due to the men of my company ... that I am neither feared nor obeyed.” A year later another officer described how his troops, who had not been paid in a year, “ate the horses in the garrison and then retired to their houses without a *sou*.” The same year a third captain lacking money to pay them disbanded his Provençal levies who dispersed in gangs that attacked Calvinists “all over the province,” holding some for ransom and killing others.

With the onset of civil war in 1562 the royal finances completely collapsed. Desperate measures such as pawning royal jewels (Bonney 1999) and sales of church property (which brought more than 13 million livres, Le Roy Ladurie 1994:240) were completely insufficient in keeping up with military expenditures. The result was a spiraling state debt, which reached 296 million *livres* by 1595 (Bonney 1999). The debt was almost wiped out during the reign of Henry IV, but then ballooned again during the crisis of the Fronde, reaching 700 million *livres* in 1661 (Briggs 1998).

5.4 Crisis: 1570–1600

By the end of the stagflation phase the population of France has recovered to roughly the level obtaining before the fourteenth century collapse. In the late sixteenth and all of seventeenth centuries population growth ceased. The overall population of France (adding together rural and urban locations and northern and southern provinces) “stagnated”, so that the French population of 1720 was essentially the same as that of 1560 (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:232). This does not mean that population numbers were at an equilibrium: there were several temporal fluctuations, and different regions of the kingdom followed diverging trajectories. Here we focus on the temporal fluctuations, while deferring the discussion of regional variations to the next section.

Le Roy Ladurie distinguishes three classes of temporal fluctuations: (1) those occurring on the time scale of centuries (this is what we call secular cycles), (2) on the time scale of decades (which we call bigenerational cycles), and (3) on the annual time scale. During the period of 1560–1720 there were three fluctuations of the second type (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:233). (1) Population decline of the war of religion followed by some recovery during the reign of Henri IV and early years of Louis XIII. (2) Decline of the Thirty Years War and the Fronde followed by a

recovery under Fouquet and Colbert. (3) The troubles of the second half of the reign of Louis XIV, followed by a sustained population take-off under his two successors that finally broke through the medieval ceiling of 20 million (see Figure 4.1a).

The proximate mechanisms of population declines were the three scourges of plague, famine, and war. Measured by the number of communities hit by the plague (Biraben 1975), the incidence of epidemics increased monotonically from the minimum of 1400 throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Figure 5.4). The plague reached pandemic levels first during the height of the wars of religion (in the 1580s) and then again at the peak of the Thirty Years War (the 1620s and 30s). In 1583 the plague may have killed one-third of the inhabitants of the city of Angers (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:270). Elsewhere in the Anjou many parishes lost one-quarter to one-third of dwellers. In the seventeenth century the Anjou was repeatedly hit by comparable outbreaks in 1626–7, 1631–2, and 1639. The plague was carried by the movements of troops and spread throughout the kingdom, affecting in alternate waves the Massif Central, the Aquitaine basin, the Armorican Massif, and the Paris basin (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:270)

Figure 5.4 Incidence of plague in France: 1450–1700 (data from Biraben 1975).

Famine was widespread during this period, from the food shortages arising from the activities of the League in the 1590s, through subsistence crises of 1630, 1649, 1652, 1661, and 1694, to the great grainless winter of 1709 (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:272). The immediate triggers of these crises were periods of very cold or very damp winters and unusually wet summers. For example, the famines of 1630 and 1661 occurred during peace time and were entirely due to bad weather. However, such crises caused very short-term declines, what Le Roy Ladurie calls third-order fluctuations. “These fluctuations temporarily disturbed, without really altering them in a lasting way, the levels and ratios of population and food supplies” (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:276). During the famines of the 1590s and 1649–52, which had a much more lasting effect on population, the weather played a secondary role. It was civil war, rather than the rain that killed the grain (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:273).

We should qualify this argument by noting that it applies most cogently to the first two population declines (occurring prior to the 1660s). The third decline, in the two decades around 1700, occurred when the state was strong (although it coincided with a series of particularly intense external wars). In our opinion, therefore, it was not brought about by demographic-structural mechanisms. Historians proposed various explanations for it, of which two appear most probable: the significant worsening of the climate and the great demands placed on the French peasantry by the aggressive external policy of Louis XIV. In any case, the issue of the third population decline falls outside the temporal framework of this chapter, and in the following we focus on the population dynamics up until 1660.

We see that, although the proximate factors of population declines during this period (1560–1660) included epidemics and famine, it was often troop movements that spread epidemics, and the harvests were threatened or damaged by military operations and looting soldiers. Thus, the fundamental mechanism of population fluctuations was sociopolitical instability leading to civil war within the kingdom, and the weakening of the state which made it susceptible to foreign invasions.

The period of heightened political instability in France was about a century long, roughly 1560–1660. There were two waves, (1) Wars of Religion culminating around 1590, and (2) a period of magnate rebellions, Huguenot insurrections, and peasant uprisings culminating in the Fronde of 1648–53 (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Revolutionary situations in France, 1500-1900 (Tilly 1993:151).

1548	Pitaud insurrection in Guyenne
1562-3	First war of religion
1567-8	Second war of religion
1568-9	Third war of religion
1572-3	Fourth war of religion
1574-6	Fifth war of religion
1577	Sixth war of religion
1578-9	Seventh war of religion
1579-80	Eighth war of religion
1585-98	Ninth war of religion
1594-5	Croquant rebellions in South-west
1614-5	Civil war in Brittany
1617	War of Mother and Son
1619-20	War of Mother and Son
1621-2	Hueguenot wars
1625	Hueguenot wars
1627-30	Hueguenot wars (English intervention)
1629-30	Croquant uprising
1635-6	Croquant uprising
1637-41	Croquant uprising
1639	Norman rebellion
1643-4	Revolt of South-west
1648-53	The Fronde
1655-7	Tardanizat rebellion (Guyenne)
1658	Sabotiers rebellion (Sologne)
1661-2	Bénauge rebellion (Guyenne)
1662	Lustucru rebellion (Boulonnais)
1663	Audijos rebellion (Gascony)
1663-72	Angelets guerilla warfare (Rousillon)
1675	Papier Timbre, Bonnets Rouges rebellions (Brittany)
1702-6	Camisards rebellions (Cévenne, Languedoc)
1768-9	Corsican rebellion
1789-99	French Revolutions and counter-revolutions
1815	Hundred Days
1830	July Revolution
1848	French revolution
1851	Louis Napoleon's coup d'état
1870	State collapse, occupation, republican revolutions
1870-1	Multiple communes

The two peaks of internal warfare were separated by a relatively stable two decades under Henry IV and the early years of Louis XIII. The wars of religion may have resulted in a population loss of 20% or even more (Benedict 1985:96). In Orléans population was reduced by one-third from 1561 to 1597 (Dupâquier et al. 1988:197). The population of Rouen was reduced by more than quarter between 1562 and 1594 (Benedict 1975:232). During the second period of sociopolitical instability demographic losses in some regions were even greater. Thus, as a result of the combined effect of the Thirty Years War and the Fronde certain provinces in the north and

east probably lost close to a half of their inhabitants (Dupâquier et al. 1988:152). The south of France was much less affected (this will be discussed Section 5.6).

5.5 A case-study: the Norman nobility

As a result of researches by such historians as Guy Bois, James Wood, and Jonathan Dewald, we have excellent quantitative data on the nobility of one region of France—Normandy. The situation in Normandy is particularly interesting because this province appears to be reasonably representative of northern France. It is situated next to the core of the French state, but unlike Ile-de-France, its development was not heavily distorted by the influence of the capital with its Royal court and the central administrative apparatus. Thus, what we learn about the Norman situation at the very least yields testable hypotheses about other French regions and France as a whole. Certainly, it appears that the insights of Guy Bois, developed on the Norman material, proved to be of general validity, especially for northern France, but also for the whole kingdom, as long as known variations in social structures between the north and south are taken into account.

The dynamics of elite numbers

The first issue is, what were the numerical dynamics of nobility, and, in particular, how did the ratio of noble/commoner households evolve during the Valois cycle? Using a variety of data sources, Bois (1984:71-77) established that the peak of general population during the sixteenth century was achieved by 1560. In fact, the peak was essentially approached by 1540. After 1540 baptism numbers in various communities stagnated (more precisely, they oscillated with periods of about a generation). Above we presented data that the secular decline of population of northern France took place between 1560 and 1660 (with shorter-term fluctuations around this trend) followed by population growth (interrupted by another decline c.1700). By 1720 population numbers probably regained the level of 1560.

Numerical dynamics of nobility obeyed a distinctly different pattern from the one characterizing general (commoner) population. Based on the study of periodic investigations of the nobility in the *élection* of Bayeux in Lower Normandy Wood (1980) was able to reconstruct the evolution of their numbers during the period 1463–1666 (Table 5.2a).

Table 5.2. Nobility of the *élection* of Bayeux as revealed by the *recherches*, or periodic inspections of noble credentials by crown officials.

(a) Numbers

year	Noble families				Condemn.
	Total	Old	New	<i>Anoblis</i>	
1463	211	211	—	—	6.2%
1523	273	177	96	41	—
1540	309	172	52	15	1.6%
1598	559	229	179	77	1.4%
1624	520	211	41	5	3.2%
1666	592	183	109	28	6.0%

Total = total number of noble households

Old = the number of noble families who were ennobled prior to 1463

New = the number of noble families appearing in the *élection* during the previous period.

Anoblis = the number of new noble families that were ennobled during the previous period

Condemn. = percentage of family heads permanently condemned (refused noble status) by the *Recherche* Commissions

(b) Rates of change

Period	Rate of change, % per year		Arrival rate, families per year	
	all	old	New	<i>Anoblis</i>
1463-1523	0.43	-0.29	1.6	0.7
1523-1540	0.73	-0.36	3.1	0.9
1540-1598	1.02	0.36	3.1	1.3
1598-1624	-0.28	-0.59	1.6	0.2
1624-1666	0.31	-0.18	2.6	0.7

Rate of change = the proportional change (percent per year) of noble families established at the beginning of the period to the end of the period. Negative sign indicates decrease.

Old: families whose nobility dated before the previous *recherche*.

Arrival rate = the proportional increase (number of families per y) of nobility as a result of appearance of new families (both noble immigrants and recent *anoblis*).

Anoblis: families known to have been ennobled during the period preceeding the *recherche*.

At first, the total number of noble households grew slowly. In the eighty years before 1540 the numbers of nobles expanded at the rate of less than 0.5% p.a. During the same period, the general population of Normandy increased at an average rate of 1.1% p.a. (from 30 to 75 on the relative scale in Figure 2 of Bois 1984:76). As a result, the proportion of nobles to total population declined. In fact, we can put an absolute estimate to this quantity as follows. In 1713 the *élection* of Bayeux contained 22,620 hearths (Wood 1980:22). The peak of 1560 must have been very close to this value, and by 1540 the population was perhaps 10% less. Thus, there were at least 20,000 households in this region by 1540 of which 309 were noble implying the proportion of nobility at 1.5 percent.

Between 1540 and 1600, while the general population stagnated (in fact, declining during 1570–1600), the nobility numbers exploded. The growth rate during 1540–98 was over 1% p.a. During the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century the numbers of nobility stagnated (even declining between 1598 and 1624), but since the general population probably reached its minimum around 1660, the proportion of noble households to the total was at that time over 3%, double its value of 1540. To sum up, between 1460 and 1540 noble numbers increased, but more slowly than commoners, so that noble/commoner ratio decreased to 1.5%; between 1540 and 1600 commoner population stagnated while noble numbers exploded; and between 1600 and 1660 both commoner and noble numbers stagnated, with the noble/commoner ratio at around 3%.

The nobility of the Bayeux region were primarily rural. A third to one-half of them were sword nobles, and only between 3 and 6% served as officials or professionals (Wood 1980:75,86). To examine the dynamics of the robe nobility during the sixteenth century we turn to the study of Dewald (1980) of the magistrates in the Parlement of Rouen. The numbers of high officials in Rouen experienced a tremendous growth during the sixteenth century (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3. The growth of the number of high officials in Rouen (Dewald 1980:69).

Time period	Cour des Aides	Parlement	Chambre des comptes	Bureau des Finances	Total
XV c	8	–	–	–	8
1499	8	35	–	–	43
1554	15	66	–	–	81
1600	15	83	64	12	174

later XVII c	?	?	?	?	200
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In the late fifteenth century, before the establishment of Parlement in 1499, there was only one sovereign court in Rouen (the *Cour des Aides*), which included eight members. Two hundred years later, the late seventeenth-century intendant Voysin de La Noiraye listed two hundred members of Rouen’s four sovereign courts. The lion’s share of this growth occurred prior to 1600. Just the membership of Parlement increased from 35 to 83 during the sixteenth century (Dewald 1980:69).

Such a drastic expansion in the number of officials was not peculiar to Normandy. At the other end of France, in Montpellier, the number of office-holders almost quadrupled from 112 in 1500 to 442 in 1600 (Greengrass 1985:122). It was estimated that in the whole of France royal officials numbered slightly over 4,000 in 1515 (Salmon 1976:79). This number doubled during the next fifty years, then tripled yet again. By 1610 there were 25,000 office-holders in France (Le Roy Ladurie 1994:275). During the seventeenth century the numbers of officials oscillated wildly, increasing to perhaps 50,000 by the 1660s (a survey ordered by Colbert counted 46,047 venal office-holders). The administration of Colbert made a concerted effort to reduce this number, so that by 1670 Colbert was claiming to have suppressed 20,000 offices (Doyle 1996:23). Towards the end of the century the number of venal offices has again increased, as the government of Louis XIV used all expedients to raise money for the grueling series of foreign wars.

Causes underlying the growth of elite numbers

To sum up, the numbers of nobility greatly expanded between 1450 and 1660, with the bulk of increase occurring during the second half of the sixteenth century. The numbers of robe nobility exhibited a particularly spectacular increase, but sword nobility numbers also increased very substantially. In rural areas, such as the Bayeux region, the proportion of sword to robe nobles stayed roughly constant. How was this enormous expansion of nobility accomplished? The change in the number of nobles was determined by two processes: the natural increase of established noble families and the appearance of new nobles (*anoblis*), resulting from upward mobility. Table 5.2b (column “growth rate”) gives the rate of change in the number of the established noble families in the Bayeux region. For most time periods, the numbers of established families shrank (as a result of failure in the male line, emigration from the region, or loss of the noble status). Only in one period, 1540–98, the natural increase resulting from family splitting (when the family patrimony is split between two or more sons, each of whom establishes a separate nuclear family) overwhelmed the forces reducing the numbers of old nobility. These dynamics are illustrated by the numbers of ancient nobility (those who were ennobled prior to 1463): decline from 1463 to 1540, a jump to 1598, followed by another period decline (Table 5.2a).

The sixteenth century was the period of the highest upward mobility. We should note that the majority of “new” nobles appearing in the Bayeux region were actually old nobles immigrating from elsewhere. Thus, in order to study upward mobility, we need to focus on those individuals who were elevated from the commoner to noble status, the *anoblis*. The social origins of the newly ennobled were quite diverse. But the main requirement for obtaining (and preserving) noble status was wealth, usually based on owning land, or office, or both. Thus, families entering nobility were already a part of the elite (or, perhaps, we should call them elite aspirants). Table 5.2b indicates that the dynamics of upward mobility largely paralleled those of already established nobility. The appearance rate of *anoblis* grew throughout the sixteenth century, reaching a peak in 1540–98, and then collapsed in the seventeenth century (Table 5.2b). Thus, the period 1540–98 was not only particularly favorable to the survival and multiplication of the old noble families, but also to upwardly mobile commoners.

A more precise (in the sense of better temporal resolution) look at the dynamics of upward mobility can be gained by examining the numbers of ennoblements that were registered with the *Chambre des Comptes* in Paris (Figure 5.5). It is clear that the greatest influx of new nobles occurred not uniformly during the period of 1540–98, but towards the end of the century, during the Wars of Religion. This correlation between civil war and the rate of ennoblements is not a spurious one, since all three peaks of ennoblements (1350–1410, 1570–1600, and 1640–60) occurred during the periods of high sociopolitical instability.

Figure 5.5 Ennoblements in France, 1350–1660 (Schalk 1982).

Elite incomes and wealth

The next question is why the elites, both established and aspirants, were doing so well during the sixteenth century. We note that the main requirement for upward mobility during this period was possession of sufficient wealth. Nobility was essentially open to any wealthy family, if it was willing to play by the rules and be patient. Strategies for achieving noble status included purchasing land (preferably a fief), acquiring offices, marrying well, and sending sons to the university or military service.

The economic conjuncture for elites and elite aspirants was good during the middle part of the sixteenth century. The main engine of elite prosperity was the growth of income from agriculture. Landed revenues of a number of Norman seigneuries are known, and they show similar trajectories. For example, the receipts of the county of Tancarville collapsed during the first half of the fifteenth century, then enjoyed a mild recovery to 1510, and more rapid growth to the 1540s (Bois 1984:257). The total income of the Roncherolle family also collapsed during the fifteenth century. Between 1480 and 1520 the nominal revenue increased. Its real value, when measured in grain stagnated (but grew when measured in “chicken-equivalents”). Between 1520 and 1570, however, the revenues grew rapidly, both in terms of grain and poultry (Dewald 1987:234). In the seventeenth century, the revenues stagnated. The estate of Saussey, belonging to the Maignart family of wealthy Rouen magistrates, provides another illustration of the same pattern (Table 5.4)

Table 5.4 Total rent, Saussey (Dewald 1980:212).

Date	Rent in <i>mines</i> of wheat
1483	92
1522	99
1566	174
1575	181
1583	168
1589	150
1594	72

There was little movement between 1480 and 1520. The great jump in real revenues came between 1520 and 1560 (after 1575 revenues declined as a result of economic troubles of tenants). A doubling of income in grain-equivalents, however, was an unusually good showing. There was a great diversity among the estates in their response to the changing economic circumstances of the sixteenth century. Losses to inflation were serious on some estates held by robe nobility of Rouen, especially on those whose “enfeoffed domains” were leased by money rents (Dewald 1980:208). Most typical were such estates as Bec Crespain belonging to the Romé

family. In the years 1517–29 all Bec Crispin revenues (including the demesnes and enfeoffed domain) were leased for 667 livres per year (around 350 hectoliters of grain at the Paris prices). The enfeoffed domain alone was leased for 2,075 livres (340 hl of grain) in 1604 and 3,150 livres (350 hl) in 1638. In other words, the total revenue in real terms increased between 1520 and 1600, since this number does not include the revenues from the demesne, and then stayed constant during the first half of the seventeenth century. Those Norman estates that could be followed were in much the same situation as Bec Crispin (Dewald 1980:208).

In sum, during the half-century after 1520 (that is, the stagflation phase of the Valois cycle) average revenues from land at the very least kept the pace with the price of grain, and on many estates grew in real terms. The most likely explanation for this pattern is the overpopulation during these period that drove down real wages and pushed up real rents. Yearly income from office also increased at a rapid pace: between 1520 and 1610 fees charged by the magistrates of Rouen increased eightfold (Dewald 1980:158).

The growth of annual incomes and total wealth of many Rouen magistrates can be followed by examining the probate records and account books. During the sixteenth century typical income of a Rouen *parlementaire* grew ten-fold, from 500 to 5,000 livres (Table 5.5). In real terms, income more than doubled by the 1540s, and the slightly fell towards the 1580s. It is also interesting to follow the combined incomes of the magistrates, as an estimate of what their cost was to the society as a whole. The combined income continued to expand throughout the whole period (Table 5.5). This is an interesting and signifiant pattern: although the total income of all Rouen parlementaires increased substantially between the 1540s and 1570s-1580s, the number of magistrates doubled, resulting in a decrease of the per capita income.

Table 5.5. Incomes of *parlementaires* of Rouen, 1500-1600 (Dewald 1980).

Period	numbers	Income, l.t.	Price of wheat	Income, hl	Combined income, hl
1500s	35	500	0.99	503	17,600
1520s	35	1,000	1.86	537	18,800
1540s	35	2,500	2.27	1,102	38,600
1570-80s	66	5,000	6.64	753	49,700

We can check these results by looking at the salaries of office-holders in Montpellier (Greengrass 1985:122). The data are not strictly comparable, because for Rouen’s magistrates we have estimates of total income (which is a better measure of their economic well-being), while for Montpellier the data refers to salaries, with which the officials were (theoretically) remunerated. Furthermore, the Rouen data is for a pariticularly privileged stratum of the provincial robe nobility. Nevertheless, some patterns are shared by both data sets (Table 5.6). In particular, there was a great expansion of official numbers as well as of their cost to the society (in real terms). Second, the particularly rapid expansion of official numbers was during the third quarter of the sixteenth century, when their numbers doubled at both Rouen and Montpellier, and this numerical expansion was accompanied by a drop in the average income or salary.

Table 5.6. Salaries of royal officers in Montpelier, 1500-1600 (Irvine, unpub. Ph.D. thesis, cited from Greengrass 1985:122)

Period	numbers	Combined salaries	Adjusted for inflation	Average real salary
1500	112	14,885	59,540	532
1550	125	33,350	66,700	534

1575	253	67,520	67,520	267
1600	442	256,791	184,890	418

It would be very interesting to examine the dynamics of incomes of other segments of the nobility, but unfortunately direct data for such an investigation is lacking. Dewald, however, was able to obtain a glimpse by examining marriage contracts, which provide an approximate idea of the relative wealth of different groups. Between the first half of the sixteenth century and c.1600 the median dowry in parlementaire marriages increased six-fold (Table 5.7). Recollect that the annual income increased by about the same order of magnitude, from 1,000 to 5,000 livres (Table 5.5). The dowries of lesser gentry (*écuyers*), on the other hand, increased only two-fold, while the growth of dowries in lawyer (*avocats*) marriages was intermediate between those of lesser gentry and parlementaires (Table 5.7). During the same period wheat prices increased about four-fold. In other words, the lesser gentry were losing ground, the parlementaires were getting ahead, and the lawyers were just breaking even, or perhaps slightly slipping.

Table 5.7. (a) Median dowries in Normandy, 1500-1614 (Dewald 1980:128-9).

Social stratum	Median dowries, <i>l.t.</i>	
	1500-1550	1568-1614
Lesser gentry	1,320	2,625
Lawyers	1,375	5,368
Parlementaires	4,500	27,000

(b) Average dowries of Major Governors, in *l.t.* (Harding 1978:114).

Social stratum	1493-1560	1560-1605	1605-1663
Major Governors	90,000	380,000	460,000

Compression of the elites

The basic problem facing the nobility was the irreconcilable contradiction between two processes: total production stagnated after 1540 and even declined towards the end of the century while the numbers of the elites grew inexorably. One result of this dynamic was increasing exploitation of peasants, but there were biological limits on how low the standard of living of the productive class could be driven. The second consequence, therefore, was the lower real income per elite capita. This does not mean that all elite families suffered equally. On the contrary, the basic dynamic, at least for a while, was for the rich to get richer, while the poor got poorer (this is typical of the stagflation and crisis phases of secular cycles). Thus, as we have seen in the previous paragraph, the real income of the lesser gentry was declining by 1600, while the privileged segment of the robe nobility, the parlementaires, were growing more wealthy.

Within the parlementaire stratum, however, the same basic dynamic was also operating. Between 1499 and 1600 the numbers of parlementaires grew from 35 to 83 (Table 5.3). The proximate reason for this growth was the crown's fiscal difficulties, which were partially solved by a periodic sale of newly established venal offices. But it is important to point out that such offices were in great demand. In fact, as the number of venal offices was expanded, their price had risen at a spectacular rate (Doyle 1996:11). A councillorship in the Parlement of Rouen sold for less than 5,000 livres in the 1570s, 10,000 *l.t.* in the 1580s, and 20,000 *l.t.* in the 1600s. It doubled again by 1615, yet again by 1634, and by the 1670s it reached the highest point for office prices in the parlements, when it was evaluated at 88,000 *l.t.* (Dewald 1980:138-140). About half of this rise was due to inflation, but most (an almost 10-fold increase in real terms!) was driven by an intense intraelite competition. As we shall see below, economically this rise in the cost of the office did not make sense; the offices were valued for their extraeconomic value—status. This

interpretation is confirmed by the growing price of the seigneuries (fiefs), another kind of property sought primarily for its extraeconomic value. This inflation of fief values is indicated by the steadily decreasing returns of the seigneurial property: from 10% in the early sixteenth century (1507) to 4–4.5% in 1563–97, 3.3% in 1601, and 2.2% in 1627 (Dewald 1980:203).

Rising costs of office coupled with rising costs of education (Dewald 1980:135-6) had dramatic effects on the economics of office-holding. Until about 1570 offices were sold for prices corresponding to the economic returns they offered. After the great office inflation of 1570–1630, offices were bought for prestige or political importance that they offered (Dewald 1980:143). By 1610 the chances of creating a new fortune from the profits of office had become very small (Dewald 1980:160). Whereas office-holding was one of the routes for upward mobility during the sixteenth century, the magistrate stratum became increasingly closed after 1600. The situation in Rouen mirrored more general developments in France as a whole. Prior to 1600, merchant families often moved directly into royal courts by buying an office in a Chamber of Accounts or even a Parlement for their sons. After 1600, this mechanism for social mobility to the highest levels of the robe slowed down, and two or three generations of royal office, each one more exalted than the last were generally required (Collins 1995:41). The seventeenth-century tendency of slower upward mobility is reflected in the social origin of the members of the Parlement. In the mid-sixteenth century only 20% of them were sons of high officials; a century later 60% followed in their fathers' footsteps (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8. Social origins of parlementaires (Dewald 1980)

Time period	Proportion (%) who were sons of:			
	High officials	Lawyers and lesser officials	Noblemen	Bourgeois
1539-1558	23	18	8	9
1559-1578	22	10	15	7
1579-1588	28	11	6	4
1589-1598	26	2	4	6
1599-1618	47	11	13	7
1619-1638	60	5	11	4

The seventeenth century, thus, was a period of retrenchment for the robe nobility of Rouen. Their numbers essentially ceased to grow (Table 5.3), and upward mobility into their ranks was practically choked off. A similar pattern was observed for the rural nobility of Bayeux. The rate of appearance of *anoblis* families reached a peak of 1.3 families per year during 1540–98, and then dropped of to 0.2–0.7 families per year during the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century (Table 5.2b). At the same time, resistance to accepting the nobility of upwardly mobile families intensified. Whereas during the sixteenth century only 1.4–1.6% of families pretending to the noble status were condemned (denied the noble status), this proportion rose to 3.2% during the first half and 6% during the second half of the seventeenth century (Table 5.2a). Note the cyclic return of the proportion condemned to the previous peak during the fifteenth century (6.2% in 1462), another period of nobility compression.

At the same time that upward mobility into the ranks of nobility was choked off, the size of the group containing elite aspirants apparently shrank. As we stated above, one of the routes to noble status was the acquisition of a noble fief (seigneurie). Since the proportion of fiefs held by commoners is known, we can use it to obtain an idea of the size of the upwardly mobile stratum. The proportion of income from fiefs held by commoners increased from 8% in 1552 to 13% in 1587 and then declined to 2% in 1640 (Wood 1980:147). In other words, during the second half

of the sixteenth century, the pool of elite aspirants grew, while during the first half of the seventeenth century it shrank to almost zero. During the same period, the proportion of fiefs (by value) held by the old nobility increased from 52 to 72%, while the the proportion held by new nobility declined from 17 to 12%. What apparently happened was that elite aspirants converted their holding of fiefs into noble status during the sixteenth and the early seventeenth century. As upward mobility dropped off after 1600, the descendants of the former elite aspirants first became new nobles and then old nobles.

While the proportion of old nobility among the landed elites increased, the total numbers of rural nobles in Normandy probably declined towards 1700. We do not have the data for the Bayeux region, but in another rural *élection*, that of Gisors, there were 74 noble households out of the total of 7,500 in 1703, or about 1% of the population (Dewald 1987:91). In the *élection* of Rouen (excluding the city of Rouen) there were only 154 rural noble families out of population of 17,514, or less than 1%, in 1703. However, the regional capital was the home of additional 272 noble households and about 160 families of high royal officials (Dewald 1987:91).

Whereas the second half of the sixteenth century saw an erosion of incomes of the rural nobility (Table 5.7), this decline was stopped, and even reversed some time in the mid-seventeenth century. We are fortunate to have data on income distribution among the nobility of the Bayeux region at two points in time, 1639 and 1666 (Wood 1980:127–8). Mean family income rose from 1,400 to 1,900 l.t. between the two dates. Since the real value of *livre* was approximately the same at these two dates, this 34% increase in nominal terms represents a real increase in noble incomes. But an even more striking change occurred in the median income: from less than 400 to 1000 l.t. Whereas more than two-thirds of nobles disposed of an income less than 1,000 l.t., by 1666 this proportion declined below half (Table 5.9)

Table 5.9. Distribution (%) of annual revenues of noble families in the Bayeux region in 1639 and 1666 (Wood 1980:128).

Income bracket, l.t.	1639	1666
less than 1,000	67.4	49.6
1,000–10,000	29.1	48.0
more than 10,000	3.5	2.4

The category including the richest nobles also slightly declined; it was the “middle-class” that increased, reflecting the declining degree of wealth inequality.

The purging of nobility of its poorest members continued during the first half of the eighteenth century. In the *élections* of Gisors and rural Rouen (excluding the city) the proportions of noble families with income of less than 1,000 l.t. declined to 46 and 41% in 1703 and 11 and 16% in 1757, respectively (Dewald 1987:115). What was apparently happening was that poor nobles were dropping out of nobility, while the numbers of better-to-do nobles (those with more than 1,000 l.t. of annual income) stabilized. Thus, in rural Rouen region, there were 91 such nobles in 1703 and 88 in 1757, while in Gisors there were 40 such nobles in both 1702 and 1757 (calculated from Tables 32 and 33 in Dewald 1987). The proportion of impoverished nobles, however, began increasing again during the second half of the century, and on the Revolution’s eve (1788) the proportions of poor nobles increased to 26 and 17% in the two *élections* (Dewald 1987:115).

Conclusions

Is there a general pattern underlying the material we have reviewed in this section? It appears that yes. The pattern is that the numbers (or, more precisely, the noble/commoner ratio)

and per capita wealth of nobility exist in a state of dynamical interrelation. A decline in the noble/commoner ratio has a beneficial effect on noble incomes. Vice versa, increasing number of nobles in relation to commoner has a depressing effect on the mean incomes, and an even greater effect on the proportion of poor nobles. Incomes enjoyed by noble families also affect their numbers (this is a kind of feedback loop), because high incomes promote family multiplication and upward mobility, while low incomes compress nobility by squeezing out the poorest stratum. The system is not dynamically closed, however, because it is affected by such factors (which themselves vary with the phase of the secular cycle) as commoner numbers (for example, high commoner numbers drive up rents and depress wages, benefiting the elites) and sociopolitical instability. Civil wars, on one hand, speed up the ennoblement rate of elite aspirants, but, on the other hand, elevate mortality (especially for young males). One overall effect of civil wars, thus, is a diminution of the pool of elite aspirants (wealthy commoners and the younger sons of nobility) resulting in a (perhaps temporary) relief of the social pressure.

5.6 Depression: 1600-1660

Diverging population trends between North and South

As we have alluded in the previous section, there were significant variations between different regions of France in their demographic trajectories. France is a large and diverse country, and we do not necessarily expect that all of its regions would oscillate in strict synchrony. We can trace divergent trajectories of regions using the data on tithes, demography, and incidence of internal warfare. The main distinction that we will focus on is that between the French-speaking north and the Occitan-speaking south. Secondary divisions of interest are ethnic fringes of the northern France (Brittany, Flanders, and above all Alsace, which at that time was much more in the orbit of the German, rather than French politics).

The tithe records discussed Le Roy Ladurie indicate that both the south and the north followed trajectories of the same shape, which however were shifted with respect to each other by 20 years. The fifteenth century's minimum in the south occurred between 1400 and 1430, and the expansion took off between 1430 and 1450 (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:44). In the north, the minimum was during the 1440s, and the expansion started only after 1450, probably as a result of a lag-time in the incidence of war-caused disasters (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:45). A century later the south was the first to achieve the maximum (around 1540), and thereafter production stayed flat to 1560. In the north the maximum was achieved 20 years later. The south was again the first to be affected by the devastation of the wars of religion. The documents on the sale of Church property support the tithe records, and indicate that by 1568 there was a "red zone" of maximum damage centered on Poitou, Aquitaine, and Languedoc (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:251). This is where religious conflicts were the most intense and where the productive capacity was most seriously undermined by the conflict. By 1583 the worst affected zones were again in the Occitanian heartland: Aquitaine, Gascony, Languedoc, Rouergue, Auvergne, and Dauphiné. During the 1590s the war spread to the north. Normandy, Ile de France, Picardy, and Champagne were all affected by the final convulsions of the League. However, the south also was subjected to the continuing damage (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:251). Tithe records show three bad periods for Languedoc and the Mediterranean south. The first production fall (36%) occurred right after the outbreak of war in 1560. The second wave hit during the 1570s, when the production was 43% less than the pre-war level (1532–50). The third difficult period was between 1583 and 1596, when the average delivery of tithes was 36% below the pre-war level (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:263). The adjacent regions were affected almost as badly. Auvergne lost 35-40% of its productive capacity, and Lyonnais lost 40%.

The French north also experienced a significant drop in production, but it did not occur until the 1590s, and generally there was less devastation than the south. Overall the regions in the

north lost 33%, and the Paris region only 20-25% (25% in tithes and 16% in rents). Eastern France was similar to the south with respect to the depth of the fall, but the timing of collapse was the same as in the north. Thus, in Burgundy the fall of the net product of tithes (in kind) became spectacular between 1588 and 1600. The fall of grain tithes during these twelve years was 43% in relation to the prosperous period of 1550-68 (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:262-3). Finally, the least affected region in the sixteenth century was Alsace, where the net product of tithes fell only 7.3% (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:265).

During the seventeenth century the trajectories of different regions continued to diverge (and the parallelism was lost). The Mediterranean south seems to have escaped the economic and demographic catastrophes of the mid-seventeenth century (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:278). The tithes there expanded from the minimum of the 1580s until the 1670s, after which they again declined (Figure 5.6). In fact, the South entered a period of long-term pop decline that lasted from 1680 to 1740 or even 1750 (Le Roy Ladurie 1974:295, 317).

Figure 5.6 Diverging trajectories: North vs South.

In the north, there also was a recovery after the catastrophe of the 1590s, but in contrast to the south the recovery was short-lived. The extreme north-east and north of the kingdom was affected by the fighting during the Thirty Years War (1618–48). Thus in Alsace (not a part of France at that time, but we have good data on production there) grain tithes collapsed to less than 10% of their peak value (Le Roy Ladurie and Goy 1982). Even after the peace, during the 1650s, production was only 30% of that in 1620. Such northern regions like Cambrésis were also devastated by military operations between the French and Spanish. Then came the Fronde, which was particularly devastating in the central regions of the Kingdom. Thus, the curve of tithe yields around Beaune from 1500 to 1790 shows lows around 1590, 1640–60, followed by a rise from 1660 to 1720 (Benedict 1985:86)

In Languedoc and the Mediterranean south tithes in kind recovered during the early seventeenth century and then flattened around 1640. However, the tithes did not completely regain their level of the mid-sixteenth century (they were perhaps 5% below). In Auvergne the production remained 15% below the sixteenth century peak, in Burgundy 13% below, and in the Lyonnais tithes also stagnated, except in the region around Lyons. Overall, the tithe records suggest that the productive capacity of the kingdom recovered during the early seventeenth century, but did not exceed the previously achieved level of the mid-sixteenth century. The major exception to this pattern was the region around Paris, which apparently exceeded the sixteenth-century level. Thus, the net product in rents (in kind) from the estates of Notre-Dame-de-Paris increased to 44% above the the previous peak of the 1580s (Le Roy Ladurie 1987:302). However, it is hard to decide how much of this increase was due to greater production, and how much to greater exploitation of peasants.

Growth of top fortunes

As we discussed in previous chapters, the dynamics of top fortunes often provide a useful indicator about fluctuations in the economic inequality. The largest private fortune of the seventeenth century France belonged, without doubt, to Jules Mazarin, the notorious prime minister during the minority years of Louis XIV. Ministerial fortunes went on dizzying roller-coaster during the seventeenth century. Henry IV's minister Sully, who was forced to resign his position in 1610, gained a fortune estimated at his death as 5.2 million livres (Barbiche 1978). On his death in 1642, Richelieu left to his heirs a fortune of 22 million livres (Bonney 1999:127). This was a tremendous amount of wealth, but it was bettered by Mazarin, who left a fortune of 37 million to his heirs (Bonney 1999:127). This was a particularly striking achievement, because it

was accomplished in eight years, between 1653 (Mazarin lost most of his previous wealth during the Fronde of 1648–53) and his death in 1661. Second-echelon ministers also did extremely well. Claude Bullion, Richelieu's finance minister (1632–40) gained a fortune of 7.8 million in just eight years of office. Nicolas Fouquet's assets were evaluated at in excess of 15.4 million at the time of his arrest in 1661 (although his debts equaled his assets).

To place these numbers in perspective, we can compare them to what is known about the fortunes of the greatest noble houses. The fortune of one branch of Bourbons, closely related to the king, princes de Conti, was 12 million livres in 1655–65 and then declined to 7.6 million during the 1670s (Mougel 1971). Louis Gonzagues, Duc de Nevers, left an inheritance of 8 million, which was however encumbered by debts totaling 2.5 million (Harding 1978). The wealthiest noble house was probably that of the princes de Condé. Its total fortune in the early eighteenth century, shared among several branches, was estimated as 31 million (Roche 1967).

The scale of private gains by ministers from public office began to be brought under control during the reign of Louis XIV. Colbert's wealth was estimated at between 4.95 and 5.75 million, probably closer to the high end. Louvois gained a fortune of some 8 million in a career spanning two decades (1672–91). "After 1720, ministerial gains from office were small beer indeed compared to the situation before 1661" (Bonney 1999:127).

Reversal of the disintegrative trend

It is clear that the assumption of personal rule by Louis XIV in 1661 marked an important turning point in the history of France. The most dramatic development was the consolidation of the elites around the center, which ended intraelite conflict that plagued the preceding hundred years and channeled elite energies to wars of external conquest. The internal workings of how this consensus between the elites and the state was achieved has been admirably probed by William Beik (1985, 2005) using as an example provincial aristocracy of Languedoc. Essentially, the last period of high sociopolitical instability, peaking with the Fronde of 1648–53, forced the elites to understand that they needed military, diplomatic, and economic protection by the center (Beik 1985:331). Between 1560 and 1660 various factions fighting in civil wars were either entirely composed of the elites, or were elite-mobilized popular uprisings. After 1660 the elites withdrew leadership and uprisings dramatically declined (Beik 1985:12). Later popular uprisings, such as the rebellion of Cévennes peasants (1702–4) lacked support among the elites, and were easily put down.

The new consensus allowed the government of Louis XIV to rise taxes to an unprecedented level in French history (see Figure 5.2). The elites were, of course, the primary beneficiaries. First, comparative distribution of tax flow between crown and regional elites in 1647 and 1677 (Beik 1985:267) shows that at least in Languedoc the regional elites were able to increase the share of taxes that remained in the province. Second, the lion's share of taxes went into financing the wars of Louis XIV, which meant improved employment for the sword nobility. Furthermore, at least during the late seventeenth century, Louis's program of external conquest was highly successful.

There are, however, some puzzling aspects of post-1660 economic and social dynamics or, at least, certain developments do not fit well with the standard demographic-structural theory. Population declined between 1590 and 1660 but not dramatically. Real wages increased to a peak during the 1680s, but even at the peak, the real wage was less than half of the "golden age" of the early fifteenth century. Agricultural wages "exhumed" by Jacquart and discussed by Le Roy Ladurie (1987:352) followed the same general pattern, at least around Paris. Sustained population growth did not resume in 1660. The two decades around 1700 saw another substantial population

decline, although the determining (or, at least, a very important contributing) factor appears to be the worsening of the climate. Sustained period of population growth began only after 1719, and lasted to 1790 (Dupâquier et al. 1988:151). In short, while the elite and state dynamics after 1660 behaved in the way consistent with the patterns postulated by the demographic-structural theory, the demographic and economic trends characterizing commoner population between 1660 and 1720 did not. At this time we do not have a good explanation of this mismatch between theory and data. More research is needed to understand the potential impacts of the climate, a probable shift in agricultural productivity (similar to the one we quantified for the English case, see Chapter 3), or simply historical contingency.

5.7 Conclusion

In many ways the Valois cycle (1450–1660) is another textbook example of demographic-structural mechanisms in action. We are lucky in that the historical record is good enough for us to test many mechanisms postulated by the theory with concrete and detailed historical data (and that this period attracted the attention of such giants as Emmanuel le Roy Laduire). These processes include the Malthusian effects of population growth, and how population growth and elite overproduction causes state breakdown. The case study of Norman nobility, to which we devoted much space, has thrown a lot of light on how elite overproduction develops, and what consequences it has for the elites themselves as well as for other components of the social system.

In his pathbreaking work Jack Goldstone (1991) did not discuss in any significant way the preconditions of the French Wars of Religion (although he devoted some space to a later conflict, the Fronde). Yet what happened in France from 1559 on matches very well the patterns he discerned in his study of other state collapses—the financial ruin of the state, its loss of control over the military, intensifying intraelite factionalism and competition, and finally full-blown civil war.

There are also some unexplained aspects, mainly dealing with the demographic and economic dynamics of the commoner population after 1660 (which we take as the end of the cycle). In the previous section we detailed these problematic aspects, and suggested the possible avenues of research that are needed to address them. Here we only want to reiterate our view, expressed earlier, that while we think that the demographic-structural theory is an extremely useful tool for understanding historical dynamics, history is complex, and we should not expect all of it to fit within a single scheme.

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Figure 5.1: Real wage in France (kg grain per day)

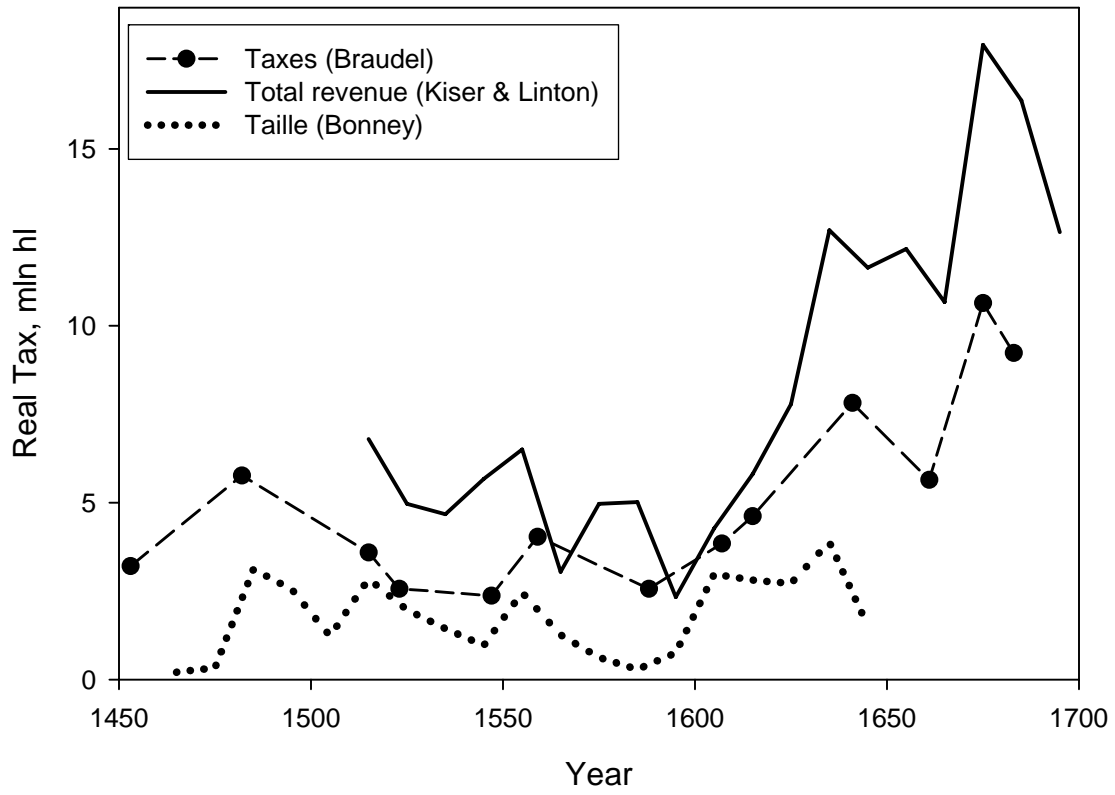


Figure 5.2: Royal taxation in France, 1453-1683

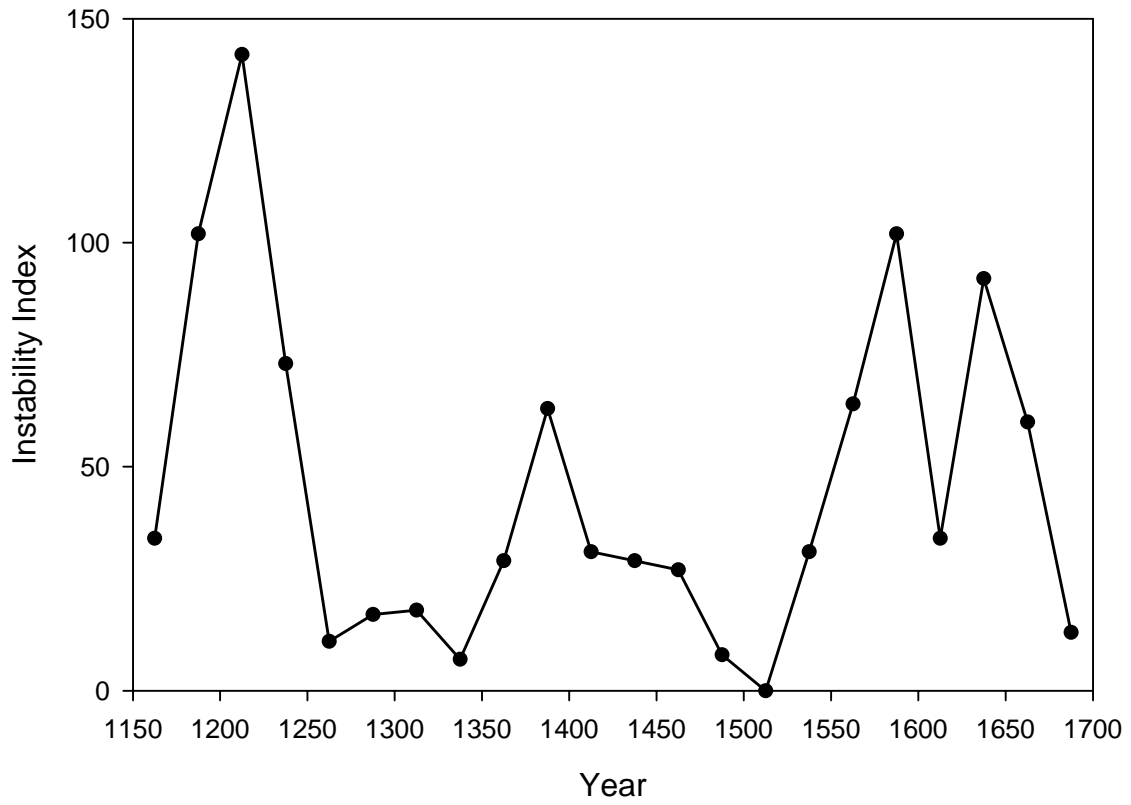


Figure 5.3: Sorokin's Instability Index for France, 1150-1700

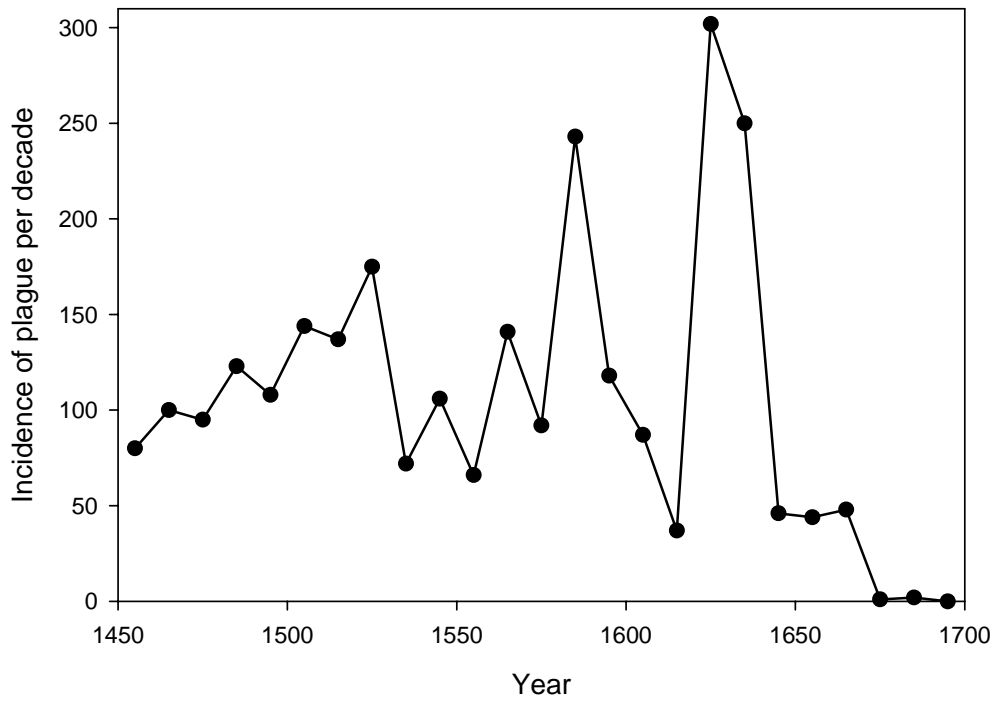


Figure 5.4: Incidence of plague in France: 1450-1700 (data from Biraben 1975)

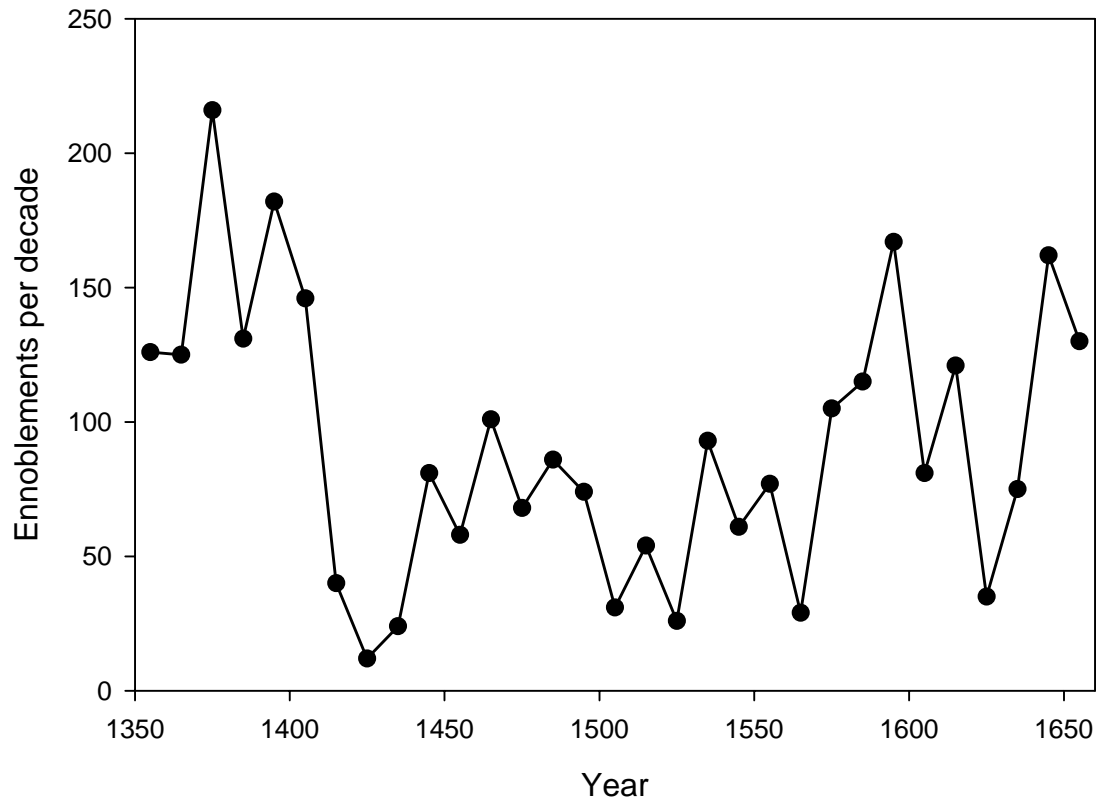


Figure 5.5 Ennoblements in France, 1350-1660



Figure 5.6

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